

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEF

SECURITY THREATS TO CANADA'S 44th ELECTIONS – UPDATE

This assessment is intended to provide situational awareness of domestic security-related threats to Canada's 44th general elections. The information in this assessment is based on reporting from the RCMP Combined Intelligence Group, law enforcement partners, searches against RCMP holdings, and open source resources (information current as of 2021-09-07). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates on a weekly and as required basis.

KEY POINTS

- A noted escalation in hostility and increase in direct and indirect threats specifically directed towards the Prime Minister (PM) continues.
- There have been no indications of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremists (IMVEs), protesters, or protest organizers overtly advocating for violence prior to protests aimed at campaign events. However, ideologically motivated linked individuals and rhetoric have appeared at campaign events. *(Update as of September 13, 2021: The protest space continues to evolve rapidly. Since September 7th, individuals have advocated for violence at leadership debates and at other public order events. The IMCIT continues to track these threats and will provide an updated strategic assessment shortly.)*
- Current anti-vaccine themed protests directed towards the PM are likely attracting individuals that are not aligned with any specific ideology or group, but who have experienced personal hardships due to COVID-19, for which they blame the Liberal government.
- Protests aimed at the Liberal campaign do not appear to be formally organized by one specific group, although social media platforms, online forums, and mobile apps are being used as recruiting tools for protesters to mobilize quickly.

PURPOSE

To provide an overview of the domestic threat environment related to Canada's 44th general elections, as of September 7, 2021.

CURRENT PROTEST CLIMATE

Since the announcement of the federal election on August 15, 2021, there has been an increase in public order activity and hostility directed at political party campaign events, with nearly all of the adverse activity targeting Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) campaign events.

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While the majority of individuals who participate in public order events in Canada do not engage in or support the use of violence, the potential exists for protests to attract ideologically motivated violent extremists who advocate, support, or are willing to engage in violence in order to advance a particular worldview or cause. A number of recent LPC campaign events that have been met with protest have attracted ideologically motivated linked individuals and rhetoric.

- On August 27, 2021, an individual known for promoting QAnon conspiracy theories advertised the location of the PM's campaign event in Bolton, ON. Although it is unknown if the individual attended the protest at the event, it is likely some individuals in attendance were motivated, in whole or in part, by their conspiratorial beliefs.
- On August 29, 2021, protesters at a LPC campaign event in Cambridge, ON¹ attempted to block access to a planned LPC announcement. The PM was able to hold his announcement, but was heckled loudly the entire time and the event was significantly disrupted. Protesters were very angry, aggressive and verbally threatening in their behavior. Some held signs with the words "no microchip" on them, in line with a popular conspiracy theory claiming that vaccinations are actually injecting tiny devices in people that will allow them to be tracked. As well, people were yelling "Castro" at the PM, after a popular conspiracy theory that Fidel Castro is his father.
- On August 31, 2021, the PM's event in Sudbury, ON was met with protest. Open source information indicates that an individual associated to the Canadian Combat Coalition (C3) attended the protest and claimed the location of the PM's event was provided by an airport employee.² C3 was active until 2019 at protests throughout Canada that were anti-Muslim in nature. While C3 rhetoric was ethno-nationalist in nature, events organized by the group tolerated the presence of individuals associated with racially motivated networks.
- On September 1, 2021, the "Stop the Steal" slogan appeared on promotional material on a s.37 [REDACTED] promoting an anti-vaccine rally on September 11, 2021 in Calgary, AB. This slogan was prevalent in the US during its contentious election period. As of this writing, this protest was not found to be related to any particular party or campaign event.
- On September 6, 2021, gravel was thrown at the PM during a campaign stop in London, ON. Preliminary chatter on social media identified two individuals with a history of anti-government and racially and ethno-nationalist motivated rhetoric who may have been involved in the incident.³ One of the individuals appears to be associated with a People's Party of Canada (PPC) candidate from Ontario.⁴ Although as a whole, PPC candidates may not be involved in organizing protests aimed at LPC events, some PPC candidates are promoting protests online and have livestreamed from these events. In addition, a deleted tweet from an Ontario PPC candidate included a concerning comment about the PM that online social media chatter largely interpreted as suggestive of execution.⁵

Protests aimed at the LPC campaign do not appear to be formally organized by one specific group, although social media platforms, online forums, and mobile apps with public and private channels are used as recruiting tools for protesters to mobilize quickly and share the location of LPC campaign events. Although there are no formal groups organizing protests at this time, individuals motivated by different

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ideologies, in whole or in part, are likely visiting a variety of social media pages that conform with and support their worldviews and which are promoting protests aimed at LPC events.

The IMCIT assesses that anti-vaccination sentiment remains the current focus at the majority of protests aimed at LPC campaign events. Weekly protests opposed to public health restrictions, which have occurred throughout Canada since April 2020, have evolved to predominantly focus on anti-vaccine sentiment since lockdown measures were eased. Several provinces have announced the implementation of vaccine passports, and the PM recently stated that the federal government will provide a fund to help provinces create their own vaccine passports. These developments may be fueling anti-vaccine grievances as there is a perception held by some individuals that vaccine passports will create a segregated society.

The IMCIT assesses that, as campaign events continue, the PM will continue to be met with protest. The current anti-vaccine themed protests directed towards the PM are likely also attracting individuals that are not aligned with any specific ideology or group, but who have experienced personal hardships due to COVID-19, for which they blame the Liberal government. While the IMCIT has no information indicating that protesters or protest organizers are overtly advocating for violence, there is increased social media discussion about the tense nature of recent protests and interest in protesting at LPC campaign events in the future.

Media coverage discussing the frequency of protests directed towards the PM, sign vandalism, and the current anti-Trudeau narrative in the online environment⁶ may also embolden individuals to continue to protest LPC campaign events across Canada to express a variety of grievances. It is highly likely that future disruptions will continue to drive discussions on social media dedicated to anti-vaccine rhetoric.

The geographic location of future LPC campaign events may impact the specific grievances expressed at a protest, however. Ontario is one of a few provinces where anti-vaccine protesters have been very vocal; this could be due, in part, to the duration of various periods of lockdown within the province. LPC campaign events in British Columbia, for example, have witnessed protests related to Indigenous causes and environmental issues.^{7 8}

LPC campaign events continue to generate the majority of protest activity, but other party candidates and venues have also been the subject of recent adverse actions. The media has reported that the NDP and Green Party Leaders have had racist remarks directed towards them while campaigning⁹ and a Calgary Conservative MP has expressed concern about recently being aggressively approached while out in public and has received threats by phone.¹⁰ In addition, on September 2, 2021, PPC leader Maxime BERNIER was hit in the head with an egg while posing for a photo with an individual at a campaign stop in Saskatoon, SK.¹¹ On September 4, 2021, a protest was held outside the Elections Canada office for Prince George, BC, which resulted in disruption of access to electors.¹²

The RCMP continues to track and assess public order and public safety threats and engages with applicable security and law enforcement partners as required.

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THREATS TO PROTECTED PERSONS

For the year-to-date (as of September 7, 2021) the RCMP has opened 395 files regarding direct and indirect threats to Protected Persons, with the vast majority targeting Prime Minister Justin TRUDEAU (209). There have been seven files opened regarding threats to Conservative Party leader Erin O'TOOLE, three regarding Bloc Quebecois leader Jean-Francois BLANCHET, and four relating to NDP leader Jagmeet SINGH. From the start of the writ period on August 16 to the time of this writing, there have been 39 files opened regarding threats to the PM and two for Erin O'TOOLE.

Threats against Protected Persons encompass a range of rhetoric, including vague, adverse comments (e.g., "Good riddance to Justin") and more direct comments containing threats with a specific action intended to be taken against a specific target (e.g., "Shoot Trudeau now"). Threats arise in the form of phone calls to the offices of Protected Persons or other government offices, verbal statements, and social media posts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, 4chan and s.37.

Recurring themes¹³ appear in the threats and adverse comments directed at Protected Persons. Grievances against COVID-19 restrictions, usually in response to related public announcements and statements, appear to be the most commonly reported theme. Several persons of interest involved in making threats and adverse comments against Protected Persons are known to have posted conspiracy-based sentiments about the COVID-19 pandemic, including the belief that it is a "scamdemic", manufactured to justify what they perceive are tyrannical government policies. Other recurring threats and adverse comments directed at Protected Persons relate to anger over firearms restrictions, overall anti-government sentiments, personal grievances, and racially-based slurs.

The RCMP continues to monitor and assess all threats to Protected Persons and engages with applicable security and law enforcement partners as required.

Distribution List

RCMP, s.37 Panel of Five

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¹ <https://www.therecord.com/news/federal-election/2021/08/29/angry-crowd-greets-trudeau-in-cambridge.html>

² <https://twitter.com/antihateca/status/1432837060084178945>

³ <https://twitter.com/aliceinldnland/status/1435063323603709958>

⁴ <https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/police-probe-stones-tossed-at-trudeau-witnesses-point-to-ppc-official>

⁵ Personal Info. [REDACTED]

⁶ <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/election-2021/hostility-on-2021-campaign-trail-defaced-campaign-signs-toxic-tweets-and-cancelled-rallies>

⁷ https://twitter.com/BezirganMocha/status/1428465681066909699?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweete%7Ctwterm%5E1428465681066909699%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.rebe%7Cnews.com%2Ftrudeau_campaign_bus_blocked_by_indigenous_protesters_on_vancouver_island

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/protesters-vancouver-trudeau-1.6152313>

⁹ <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-jewish-liberal-candidates-ndp-leader-jagmeet-singh-face-racist-attacks/>

¹⁰ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8148942/canada-election-trudeau-event-protesters/>

¹¹ <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/video-shows-man-egging-maxime-bernier-at-campaign-stop-in-saskatoon-1.5574374>

¹² Elections Canada Security Incident Coordination Centre email, dated September 4, 2021

¹³ [REDACTED]

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